

Abraham Lincoln papers

Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address¹, [March 4, 1865]

1 The only known manuscript of Lincoln's famous Second Inaugural Address, this document appears to be a fair copy, rather than a composition draft. Its large lettering and well-spaced lines suggest it was copied out fair as a reading copy. This is confirmed by the revision he made to the address's ending, which could have been effected by inserting additional words between the lines. Instead, he made the revision by pasting a slip of paper, or tab, over the last two lines of his text and writing the revised version on the tab.

At some point it was decided to make printed copies available to the press. The name written in pencil in the top margin of the first page of the manuscript, "Flynn," is almost certainly that of the typesetter assigned by the printer to set the manuscript into type. After proofreading the galleys of what would become a three-page printed handout for the press, Lincoln seems to have retained a set of uncorrected galleys and fashioned this into his reading copy. He did this by cutting the printed galleys up into smaller segments (mostly consisting of one sentence), arranging them into two columns, and pasting them onto a larger sheet. The text of this reading copy shows two verbal changes, which are present also in the manuscript copy, and many punctuation changes, which are not. This is presumably the text that Lincoln read from at the inaugural ceremony at the Capitol on March 4, 1865.

For more details on the manuscript, the three-page printed press handout, and the reading copy, see David C. Mearns and Lloyd A. Dunlap, Library of Congress Press Release, Feb. 8, 1965. Both manuscript and reading copy were presented by the president to John Hay and were in turn presented by his family to the Library of Congress in 1916.

The text of the manuscript is followed by that of the reading copy.

[Manuscript copy]

Fellow Countrymen²

2 In pencil, possibly in another hand.

At this second appearing to take the oath of the presidential office, there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement, somewhat in detail, of a course to be pursued, seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public

declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention, and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself; and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil-war. All dreaded it — all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war — seeking to dissolve the Union, and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

One eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the Southern half part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war; while the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope — fervently do we pray — that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said f[our] three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether"

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan — to achieve and cherish a lasting peace among ourselves and with the world. to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with the world. all nations.³

3 Lincoln revised his text by covering the last two lines ("to achieve . . . the world.") with a tab, on which he wrote the revised ending ("to do all . . . the world."). A further change was made on the tab itself by striking "the world" and substituting "all nations."

[Endorsed by Lincoln:]

Original manuscript⁴ of second Inaugural presented to Major John Hay.

4 Lincoln's characterization of this document as the "original manuscript" must be regarded with some latitude, as the manuscript gives every evidence of being a fair copy, made from an earlier composition draft. It is undoubtedly the manuscript from which the printed reading copy was set.

A. Lincoln

April 10, 1865

[Printed Reading Copy]⁵

5 Whether Lincoln planned to have his manuscript set up in print to read from, or decided to take advantage of the advance printing for the press handout, is not known. Comparison with the press handout shows this reading copy to be an uncorrected galley proof in which the printer had already made a number of minor changes in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, many of which Lincoln accepted. The additional punctuation, particularly the commas added at this late stage, probably reflects Lincoln's characteristic concern for the most effective pace and delivery.

A list of all changes appears at the end of the text.

FELLOW COUNTRYMEN: At this second appearing to take the oath of the presidential office, there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then, a statement, somewhat in detail, of a course to be pursued, seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years,

during which public declarations have been constantly called forth, on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention, and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself; and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

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One-eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the southern half part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar, and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate and extend this interest, was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war; while the government claimed no right to do more, than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered — that of neither, has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh." If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove; and that He gives to both north and south this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope — fervently do we pray — that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan — to do all which may achieve and cherish, a just and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with the world. all nations.⁶

6 Lincoln made a great many changes on this galley proof, many of which do not appear in the three-page press handout. This suggests that Lincoln made most of these changes after he had made corrections on another set of corrected galleys sent to the printer. Differences between this text and that of the holograph manuscript are of two types: A. Changes made by Lincoln to his own manuscript text. B. Changes made by the printer, some of which were accepted and some rejected by Lincoln. A list of the changes in each category follows:

A. Changes made here by Lincoln to his manuscript text:

Word changes: "half" changed to "part"; "the world" changed to "all nations" (these changes were also made in the manuscript). Commas added after "called forth"; "peculiar"; "this interest"; "to do more"; "that of neither"; "cherish". Semi-colon substituted for comma after "wills to remove".

B. Changes made by the printer:

Accepted by Lincoln: comma added after "Then"; "civil war" for manuscript's "civil-war"; "energies" for the manuscript's "energies"; "inaugural" for the manuscript's "inaugural"; "dissolve" for the manuscript's "dissole"; "One-eighth" for manuscript's "One eighth"; comma deleted after "perpetuate"; comma added after "judge not"; dash after "answered" (substituted for Lincoln's semi-colon); period after "cometh" (substituted for Lincoln's exclamation point); initial capitals changed to lower case in "southern", "slavery", "north", "south", and "living"; comma after "north and south" deleted; comma after "continue" deleted; "bondman's" for manuscript's "bond-man's"; comma added after "must be said"; comma after "Lord" deleted; period added after "altogether"; comma after "cherish a just" deleted.

Rejected by Lincoln:

Comma deleted after "attention" restored by Lincoln; comma substituted for semi-colon after "even by war" changed back to semi-colon by Lincoln; comma deleted after "for the war" restored by Lincoln; comma deleted after "magnitude" restored by Lincoln; comma deleted after "duration" restored by Lincoln; comma deleted after "triumph" restored by Lincoln; comma deleted after "Bible"



restored by Lincoln; semi-colon changed to comma after "same God" restored by Lincoln; comma deleted after "lash" restored by Lincoln; comma deleted after "lasting peace" restored by Lincoln.